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SUBJECT: ARMENIA ADOPTS NEW ANTI-TRAFFICKING NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

¶1. On December 6, Armenia's government approved the new 2007-2008 National Plan of Action (NPA) on Combating Trafficking in Persons (TIP). Armen Baiburtyan, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, presented the NPA on behalf of the government, and said the new NPA will focus more on the implementation of legal mechanisms to combat trafficking. Referring to the State Department's annual TIP report, as well as the European Neighborhood program that Armenia is implementing, Baiburtyan emphasized the importance of the NPA in bringing Armenia into conformity with international anti-trafficking standards and practices.

¶2. On December 7, the Director of the International Organizations Department at the Foreign Ministry told us that the Armenian government decided to raise the administrative level of the current interagency anti-trafficking commission to that of a Council. (Note: According to the Foreign Ministry, the government's designation of a Council is significant, as it is the highest administrative entity possible within the government structure, and much higher than commissions. End note.) The director said the decision reflects the growing importance the government attaches to its anti-trafficking efforts. The approval of the new anti-trafficking Council is supposedly days away.

¶3. Once the Council is established, the existing anti-trafficking commission will become a working group that assists the new Council in its anti-trafficking programs. The Council will be comprised of Ministers, and will be headed by the Deputy Prime Minister who also holds the post of Minister of Territorial Administration. Unlike the previous commission, the Council's decisions will be binding, and in addition to coordinating GOAM anti-trafficking efforts, it will also have an oversight function in its mandate.

¶4. COMMENT: While the new NPA has been long in coming, we are encouraged that it will focus more rigorously on implementation of anti-trafficking mechanisms. We are also cautiously hopeful that the upgrade of the interagency commission to a Council will give anti-trafficking efforts more purpose, force, and effect. We have consistently prodded the GOAM to take anti-trafficking more seriously, and will continue to do so. End comment.

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